



# ENT & Audiology

*A Department of Rutland Regional Medical Center*

## **Oto-Rhino-Laryngology, Allergy, Head & Neck Surgery**

**Rutland Office:** 69 Allen Street, Suites 1, 3 & 4, Rutland, VT 05701  
802.775.3314 800.639.7014 802.775.9617 fax

**East Dorset Office:** 51A Tennis Way, East Dorset, VT 05253  
802.366.8195 802.366.8277 fax

### *Board-Certified Providers:*

David R. Charnock, MD, FACS

Jennifer H. Judkins, MD

Patricia A. Schroeder, FNP

Kerry B. Finch PA-C, MSPAS

Susan M. Cooley, PA-C

Mitchell B. Kramer, PhD

Kelley L. Rohrer, AuD, FAAA, CCC-A

Lily V. Hughes, AuD, CCC-A

### **Allergy Season Has Arrived**

by Kerry M. Finch, MSPAS, PA-C

The last of the snow has finally melted, the grass and trees are in full bloom and spring is finally upon us. For many of us, this is our favorite time of the year, time to enjoy the outdoors and all that Vermont has to offer. However, for twenty-five percent of us, spring brings along some unwanted symptoms; itchy watery eyes, stuffy noses and sneezing. Allergy season has arrived.

An allergy is an abnormal reaction of the body's immune system to a normally harmless substance, also called an allergen. Allergens include: pollens, molds, dust mites or pet dander. An individual with allergies will create antibodies that identify an allergen as dangerous, even though it isn't. When that individual comes in contact with the allergen, the body's immune system creates a reaction that can manifest with a variety of symptoms. These symptoms can include inflammation of the skin, congestion of the nose and sinuses, itchy eyes, post-nasal drip, cough, breathing difficulties or even digestive problems. The severity of allergic disease ranges from person to person. For some of us, these symptoms are merely an annoyance while for others they can cause significant impairment and lead to diminished quality of life.

While there is no cure for the bothersome symptoms of allergies, the good news is that there are testing methods and numerous treatment options that can be very beneficial. In order to best treat allergies, it is important to first identify which substances are causing the reaction. There are several methods to test for allergies. A simple blood test called a RAST test can identify antibodies in the blood to specific allergens. Alternatively, skin prick testing can be utilized for identification. This involves introducing small amounts of the allergen to the skin and measuring the reaction size.

As far as treatment goes, the simplest measure is called environmental control or trying to limit the amount of contact you have with the allergen. For example, an individual with a pet allergy would do better to remove the pets from the home or at a minimum keep the pets out of the bedroom. Someone with a dust mite allergy would be well served to vacuum frequently, use hypoallergenic bedding and wash the bed sheets in hot water at least once weekly. When allergic symptoms persist despite using good environmental control measures, more aggressive treatment strategies can be considered.

Medication therapy with decongestants, antihistamines, nasal sprays, and saline rinses are helpful in reducing the symptoms of allergies. Furthermore, some individuals are candidates for allergy immunotherapy. This form of treatment is designed to change how the body's immune system reacts to these allergens and desensitize the body to the allergens. It is the only treatment option that changes the course of the disease versus treating the symptoms. Immunotherapy can be administered via injections (allergy shots) or a solution that can be dropped under the tongue (allergy drops). These are a few of the options available to assist in management of allergies.

If your allergy symptoms are getting the better of you this season, discuss with your medical provider the best treatment strategy for you.